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ABSTRACT

Measurements were taken from 8 randomly selected Gannett papers and from 23 non-Gannett papers in an effort to determine whether Gannett papers are unlike other kinds of papers. The content of every issue of every newspaper was divided and measured into eight categories: advertising, news, opinion, letters, sports, features, entertainment, and packaging. In addition, all news stories on the front pages and the split pages were categorized according to topic. In another effort to determine a newspaper's propensity to emphasize local or nonlocal material, a tally was made of all stories of current general news interest, including feature stories that appeared to be efforts to present current factual information. Stories were identified as local and state, or national and international, or regional. From the findings it was concluded that Gannett papers tend to have characteristics that differ both from independently owned newspapers and from newspapers owned by other chains. There is support for the frequent claim by Gannett that it offers its papers local autonomy. There is also support for claims and research indicating that the Gannett Company is very profit-oriented. Findings also suggest that, in many respects, a Gannett paper resembles an independent paper more than it does a paper owned by another chain. (HOD)

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A QUANTITATIVE PROFILE OF GANNETT NEWSPAPERS

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NOTE: This paper is a condensation of an unpublished master's thesis completed in 1983 at Central Missouri State University.

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ABSTRACT

The Gannett Company is the nation's largest newspaper chain. Some critics and observers look upon chain ownership as detrimental to journalism, and some pinpoint Gannett as a particular problem. This paper examines content of Gannett papers and corresponding non-Gannett papers in quantitative terms in an effort to determine whether Gannett papers are unlike other kinds of papers.

Measurements are taken from eight randomly-selected Gannett papers and from 23 non-Gannett papers selected because they are similar to one or more of the Gannett papers studied. Measurements and tallies are made of several kinds of content. Circulation and advertising figures are also used in the analysis.

The study concludes that Gannett papers tend to have characteristics that differ both from independently owned newspapers and from newspapers owned by other chains. There is support for the frequent claim by Gannett that it offers its papers local autonomy. There is also support for claims and research indicating that the Gannett Company is very profit-oriented. It is suggested that in many respects, a Gannett paper resembles an independent paper more than a paper owned by another chain.

A QUANTITATIVE PROFILE OF GANNETT NEWSPAPERS

The Gannett Company, Inc., of Rochester, New York, owns more newspapers and sells them to more subscribers than any other newspaper chain.[1] In the newspaper field in the United States it can be said to be the most significant example of concentration of ownership.

It has been claimed that "concentration of control of daily newspapers has unique effects on all information media,"[2] that it has implications concerning freedom of the press and the preservation of that right,[3] that bigness begets power and invites control of information and even control of thought,[4] and that chain ownership affects the degree of the newspaper's involvement in and influence upon its community[5] as well as the quality of the newspaper itself.[6] Some believe chain ownership has implications for the survival of democracy.[7]

Prototypical of the expressions of concern about chain

ownership in general and Gannett ownership in particular is an article published in the Los Angeles Times in 1978.[8] The author says most chain publishers (and he names Gannett specifically) are

> largely scorned for looking on their papers as "cash registers" -- for sacrificing quality to profit, for producing newspapers that are too often timid, parochial and mediocre.

Speaking of Gannett's president and chairman, Allen Neuharth, the author writes that "the philosophy of men like Neuharth worries many in the newspaper business." The author, David Shaw, presents a bill of particulars:

> Critics object, in principle, to the loss of diversity, autonomy, hometown identification and independence it (newspaper centralization) represents, and they fear, in practice, the homogenization of the journalistic process -- and the distortion and corruption of the political process -- that they say large newspaper chains could ultimately bring about.

But there is little research to back up these expressions of concern. As of mid-1977,

> only two major studies (had) considered chain influence on U.S. dailies. Grotta argued that consumers of daily newspapers received no economic benefits from chain ownership. Wackman found that chains are not "independent in their political endorsement editorial policies."[9]

In the summer of 1977, Journalism Quarterly published a study that "tended to support the hypothesis that independently owned daily newspapers' editorials will decline in vigor after chains purchase the newspapers."[10]

In 1978 Weston suggested there might be no difference in nature between an independent owner and a chain owner.

> Such sweeping generalizations about the nature of the individuals who head the mass media remain largely unexamined and persist despite studies noting the trend toward increased media concentration . . . .[11]

Two years later, Coulson, suggesting that the public interest requires government control of the media, contended that "concentration of control of daily newspapers has unique effects on all information media," but offered not a whit of documentation of research supporting that contention.[12]

In 1979, Compaine noted an implicit belief among Americans that, in regard to the media, bigness is bad and localism is desirable. (Shaw, on the other hand, criticizes Gannett and other chains for parochialism, for failure to have a "more global orientation, emphasizing national and international coverage."[13] Compaine mentioned government proposals to break up the media and said, "The mass communications industry is unique in the American private enterprise system because it deals in the particularly sensitive commodity of ideas, information, thought and opinion. . . . (T)here is growing concern in some private and government quarters that the range of opinions to which the public has access is being limited by large media conglomerates."[14] He contended that "a chain that

is prone to milking its properties or throwing around its influence can infect numerous localities with poor or destructive journalism," and warned that "The potential danger of group ownership lies in the concentration of financial, political and social power in relatively few people."[15] After drawing these conclusions, however, Compaine acknowledged that "Relatively little empirical research has been done on the effects of chain ownership alone."[16]

There is almost no research about the Gannett company itself vis-a-vis its effect, as a company, on the content of the newspapers it publishes. Some researchers have, however, looked at the group, exploring other questions. Gannett claims to stress local autonomy and local involvement,[17] and the claim has some support in available research.[18] In general, however, we have here a case in which it might be said that everyone talks about concentration of ownership[19] but very few have done much research about it.

If there is a possibility of any kind of governmental or societal action based on the concerns that have been expressed about chain ownership, or if chain ownership poses a threat to freedom, or if there is to be informed discussion of the issue, research is in order. The Gannett Company, as the largest chain, and as one often singled out for mention

because of its profitability, invites our attention.[20]

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to examine the following hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference between a newspaper owned by the Gannett Company and any other kind of newspaper as far as can be determined by measuring the kinds of material published in those newspapers.

2. The changes in the content of a newspaper from one time period to another occur without regard to whether the paper is owned by Gannett or by some other person or entity.

Method

The names of ten Gannett newspapers were drawn at random from the complete list of Gannett-owned daily newspapers published within the United States. An effort was made to match each Gannett paper with a paper of similar size and characteristics in a community of similar size and characteristics. That proved to be complicated. There was often no perfect match. Consequently, in several cases one Gannett paper was matched with several non-Gannett papers.

Twelve dates were drawn at random, but controlled so that each month of the year was represented and so that each

day of the week was represented at least once. (All the days except Thursday and Saturday were represented twice.)

The first Gannett paper drawn was in Chillicothe, Ohio. That paper, and its match in Ashtabula, Ohio, were studied for each of the twelve dates. Each of the other pairs or groups of papers was studied for only four of the twelve dates. The specific four dates varied from group to group and were selected randomly, controlled so that three sets of papers plus the Chillicothe-Ashtabula set were studied for each of the dates drawn. The purpose of using this kind of scattered sample was to obtain, within the limited time available and at the limited cost permitted, as wide a taste of the chain as possible. Follow-up research could well go into greater depth on smaller slices.

An original goal of the research was to study those issues of each paper published on the randomly selected dates in each of two years, designated "the current year" and "the last non-Gannett year." As the research progressed, a third year was added to some sets and designated "the base year." Definitions:

(a) Current year: July 1, 1981, through June 30, 1982, selected because the project began in July, 1982.

(b) Last non-Gannett year: For each set of papers, the twelve-month period next preceding Gannett's acquisition of the Gannett paper within that set.

(c) Base year: This corresponds with the last non-Gannett year for the Chillicothe-Ashtabula set. It was selected in order to provide two years in common for all the papers in the study, so that comparable longitudinal data could be obtained. In this paper, when longitudinal comparisons are made and no other reference dates are stated, the comparison is between the base year and the current year; that is from 1976-77 to 1981-82. However, if the comparisons are said to be from the time of acquisition, they are from the last non-Gannett year (which is different for different sets) to the current year.

Here are the sets of papers selected by drawing Gannett papers at random and attempting to match them with similar papers in similar communities (the first paper listed is the Gannett paper; ownership of other papers is shown in parentheses):

Chillicothe, Ohio, Gazette; Ashtabula, Ohio, Star-Beacon (Rowley).

Tucson, Arizona, Citizen; Arizona Daily Star (Pulitzer); Austin, Texas, American-Statesman (Cox).

Stockton, California, Record; Newport News, Virginia, Times-Herald and Newport News Daily Press (jointly-owned independents).

San Bernardino, California, Sun; Torrance, California, Daily Breeze (Copley); Modesto, California, Bee (McClatchy); Bakersfield Californian (independent); Boulder, Colorado, Camera (Knight-Ridder); St. Petersburg, Florida, Times (independent); Tampa, Florida, Tribune (Media General).

Poughkeepsie, New York, Journal; New London, Connecticut, Day (independent).

Springfield, Missouri, Daily News (mornings), Leader and Press (evenings), and News and Leader (weekends); Lubbock, Texas, Avalanche-Journal (independent).

Boise, Idaho Statesman; Springfield, Illinois, State Journal-Register (Copley); Tallahassee, Florida, Democrat (Knight-Ridder); Charleston, West Virginia, Gazette (independent); Anchorage, Alaska, Daily News (McClatchy); Anchorage Times (independent); and Racine, Wisconsin, Journal-Times (Lee).

Fremont, Nebraska, Tribune; Hastings, Nebraska, Tribune (Seaton); Kearney, Nebraska, Hub (independent); North Platte, Nebraska, Telegraph (independent).

Two other Gannett papers -- the Monroe, Louisiana, News-Star-World and the Salem, Oregon, Statesman-Journal -- were also drawn and matched, but issues of those papers were not available for study. The Salem paper's match, the Stauffer-owned Topeka, Kansas, Capital-Journal, was included in the study for some purposes.

Hindsight discloses weaknesses in the matches that were not readily apparent when the matching decisions were made,[21] and complete sets of most of the papers could not be obtained for study. Nevertheless, data were collected that allow some comparisons to be made among Gannett-owned newspapers, non-Gannett chain-owned newspapers, and independently owned newspapers.

Six categories of data were collected for each paper:

General Information: This included population and circulation data and subscription and advertising rates.

Based upon these figures, data were developed for comparison purposes, including circulation as a percentage of city population, and an invented measurement called "Total Available Resources." T.A.R. measures the gross revenue available to a publisher if every inch of advertising is sold at full rate and every purchaser of the paper pays its full subscription price.

Editorials: All the editorials were assigned to a matrix adapted from one used by Stempel.[22]

	Local	State	National	International	Other
Takes Position					
Informs					
Entertains					

While most measurements in the study were taken with no qualitative bias or priority, this matrix imples that editorials taking positions are superior to editorials that do not. That bias was adopted because Gannett itself has said that its newspapers should take positions and provide leadership on issues.[23] An editorial was considered to take a position only if the position was explicitly stated. Irony and sarcasm were deliberately lost upon the researcher. Editorials dealing with non-issues or with faits accomplis, or taking positions praising or eulogizing individuals but

not dealing with issues, were considered informative, not as taking positions.

Categories. All news stories on the front pages and the split pages were categorized according to topic under eleven headings used by Deutschmann.[24] A "split page" was defined as the front page of an interior section of a newspaper, or sometimes another interior page, provided the page was devoted to general news, contained very little or no advertising, and indicated the editors' intention to use the page for general news of particular significance.

The categories:

Popular Arts and Entertainment
Crime
Accidents and Disasters
Politics and Government
Human Interest
Education and the Classic Arts
Public Health and Welfare
Public Moral Problems
War and Defense
The Economy
Science and Invention

Summary Measurements. The content of every issue of every newspaper was divided into eight categories. The amount of each of seven categories was determined by measurement. The amount of the eighth category was determined by subtracting the sum of the other seven from the total space available.

The categories and their definitions:

Advertising: All content appearing to be paid advertising, except paid obituaries and death notices.

News: All general news content, excluding features, opinion, and sports, and including vital statistics, news of record, and general news photographs.

Opinion: All editorials and editorial cartoons, all columns appearing on the editorial page or on consecutive pages of opinion.

Letters: All letters to the editor, anywhere in the paper, except those published as parts of columns.

Sports: All sports stories, summaries, columns, graphics, and photographs.

Features: Stories other than news and sports; columns not qualifying as opinion, sports, or entertainment. Includes "social stories," reviews, recipes, homemaking, gardening, hobbies, fashion, and decorating, and graphics and photos illustrating such stories.

Entertainment: All comic strips; all cartoons except editorial cartoons and cartoons meant to illustrate stories or serve as decoration; all columns by Ann Landers, Abigail van Buren, and Erma Bombeck; Art Buchwald's columns when they do not appear in the opinion section; all puzzles, games, and horoscopes; anything else published primarily for its entertainment value.

Packaging: Everything not included in the other seven categories. It includes headlines, white space, promotion of the newspaper itself, indices and tables of contents, teasers, corrections, the masthead, the flag, magazine section covers, and all drawings designed to attract the eye but adding no information to the stories they accompany.

Advertising was measured precisely. Other measurements excluded white space and headlines at the top of a column but included white space and headlines sandwiched between two items belonging in the same category. Therefore, the packaging measurement is understated and all measurements except advertising and packaging are likely to be overstated.

Detailed Measurements. Because the Summary Measurements were crude in the manner described above, all issues in the study that were published in the months of January, April, or May were also submected to a precise measuring process. Every newspaper in the study included issues from one of those months. Each story was measured individually, without its headline or its graphics. Photographs were measured together with their captions. The categories of Advertising, Sports, Letters, and Packaging were defined the same for these measurements as for the Summary Measurements. The rest of the content was broken into more numerous and more detailed categories:

-- Local News.

-- State (but non-local) News.

-- Regional News (concerning the states bordering upon the state wherein the paper was published).

-- National News.

-- International News.

-- Photographs (All photos in the paper except those used in advertising or packaging and those used on the sports pages).

- Statistics, Obituaries, Calendars, and Graphics. (All obits, all statistics printed in tabular form except sports and stocks and commodities data, all information set up in agate or in tables outside a narrative story, and all graphics related

to stories and intended to convey information. Television schedules are excluded; they count as features.

-- Markets: All financial page printed material, including statistical material and graphics.

-- Features: All the Summary Measurement feature material minus photographs and the Statistics category matter.

-- Editorials, explicitly or implicitly designated as such.

-- Syndicated columns (on the editorial pages).

-- Entertainment. Same as in Summary Measurements.

-- Local columns (on the editorial pages).

Breakdowns. In another effort to determine a newspaper's propensity to emphasize local or non-local material, a tally was made of all stories of current general news interest, including feature stories that appeared to be efforts to present current factual information. Stories were identified as Local and State, or National and International, or Regional.

Findings: Financial

Blankenburg suggests[25] that Gannett since 1970 has had a pricing policy designed to attract the affluent audience advertisers consider desirable. That policy, Blankenburg finds, consists of trying to reduce circulation, cut costs, and increase profits by raising subscription prices.

Blankenburg suggests that the reduction of circulation is likely to leave less affluent readers without a newspaper. That could diminish the ability of the less affluent to participate fully in American democracy.

Among nine groups of newspapers in this study, two Gannett papers lost circulation while their matching papers gained. One lost circulation faster than its matching papers lost. One gained circulation less rapidly than its matching papers. The San Bernardino Sun ranked in the middle of its seven-paper group in circulation gain from its acquisition in 1968 to 1982, but during the 1977-82 period, after the new pricing policy, it trailed the other six. Those five papers support Blankenburg's findings.

But three Gannett newspapers gained circulation more rapidly than did their matching papers. Finally, the Boise paper gained while all but one of its matching chain papers gained more rapidly, and the other chain paper and both independents in the group lost circulation.

Changes in circulation are partly a function of changes in population. Measured as a percentage of city population, seven of the nine Gannett papers gained after acquisition by Gannett.

Six of the nine Gannett papers charged higher subscription prices than did their matching papers. Gannett's Tucson paper was required by contract to charge the same rate as its Tucson

match; their rate was higher than that of the Austin paper in the group. San Bernardino's subscription price exceeded those of all the papers in its group except the much larger Tampa and St. Petersburg papers. The Springfield, Missouri, paper lagged slightly behind the much larger Lubbock, Texas, paper. Here, too, Blankenburg is supported.

In five cases, the Gannett paper's advertising rates were the highest in its group. In only one case was the Gannett paper's rate lowest. Advertising for the Tucson papers is sold as a package. San Bernardino and Boise both rank toward the middles of their large groups. Blankenburg is supported.

When the comparison of advertising rates is on a cost-per-thousand basis, six of the nine Gannett papers are the highest in their groups, sometimes by substantial margins. Two are the lowest in their groups; one is in the middle. More support.

The use of the artificial concept of Total Available Resources (T.A.R.) suggests but does not prove that in 80 percent of the Gannett cases and in 75 percent of the non-Gannett papers, as resources increased so did the proportion of those resources directed toward news coverage. As to Gannett's frequent claim that it stresses local news: In 60 percent of the measurable Gannett cases and in 55 percent of the measurable non-Gannett cases (3-2 and 6-5, respectively),

as revenues increased, larger proportions of total resources were directed toward local news coverage.

Thus, there appears (on the basis of these artificial and shaky figures) to be no significant difference in the apparent willingness of a newspaper's owners, be they Gannett or non-Gannett, to direct increased available resources toward news in general or local news in particular. The same finding held in regard to the sum of all non-advertising content.

Editorials, Opinion, and Letters

The data gathered for this study indicate that after Gannett acquires a newspaper, that newspaper becomes more likely to publish editorials about local topics. Generally speaking, the Gannett papers in this study were more likely than the non-Gannett papers to address local issues editorially. Those editorials, however, did not necessarily take firm positions on those local issues. In some cases, though, a newspaper became editorially bolder after its acquisition by Gannett.

Once Gannett acquires a paper, the amount of space in it devoted to opinion tends to diminish. The space devoted to letters to the editor frequently but not always increases. annett papers are somewhat more likely than other papers to

publish local columns. They tend to devote less space to syndicated columns than other papers do.

Categories of Coverage

As explained earlier, the content of the front and split pages of the papers was tallied according to categories used by Deutschmann. Category by category, here is how Gannett papers compared with the others in the study:

Popular Arts and Entertainment. Seven of eight Gannett papers included this category, compared with 17 of 23 non-Gannett papers. Where longitudinal comparisons could be made, four out of five Gannett papers increased this kind of coverage after Gannett acquired the papers while, over the same period, seven of ten non-Gannett papers decreased it. This category ranked among the top five in 75% of the Gannett papers but in only 35% of the non-Gannett papers.

Crime. Little difference was found. Two papers increased crime coverage after acquisition by Gannett, two decreased it, one held even. Over the same period, seven non-Gannett papers increased crime coverage and six decreased it. Crime ranked in the top five categories in more than 80% of all papers, Gannett and non-Gannett, but was less likely to rank in the top two categories in a Gannett paper than in a non-Gannett paper.

Accidents and Disasters. Here again, Gannett papers followed industry patterns. In three of the five cases studied longitudinally, coverage in this category increased after Gannett acquired the paper. Half the non-Gannett papers increased Accident and Disaster coverage over the same period. Half the Gannett papers included the category among the top five categories, but non-Gannett papers appeared to be more sensational -- 75% of them included it among the top five.

Human Interest. In this study, this category was a catchall for stories that not only met "human interest" criteria but also that fit nowhere else. News value in the stories relegated to this category was minimal. Longitudinally, one paper increased coverage in this category after acquisition by Gannett, three decreased it, one held even. In the most recent year studied, 25% of Gannett papers and 13% of non-Gannett papers carred no such stories on their front or split pages. The category ranked among the top five in 38% of Gannett papers and in 65% of non-Gannett papers.

Politics and Government. Gannett appeared slightly less inclined than other papers to devote their main pages wholeheartedly to political and governmental coverage. After acquisition by Gannett, two papers increased political stories, two reduced the number, one held even. Two Gannett papers led their groups in political coverage, two were in the middle, and four brought up the rear. Longitudinally, seven non-Gannett

papers increased political coverage while four reduced it and one continued steady.

The Economy. Gannett inclined toward leadership. With the oil embargo, inflation, and interest rates in the news, American interest in economic news rose during the 1970s. Three Gannett and seven non-Gannett papers increased economic coverage; one Gannett and six non-Gannett papers reduced it. In 1981-82, three Gannett papers led their groups in economic coverage, two were high in their groups, one was low, two trailed. Six of the eight Gannett papers used economic stories for at least ten percent of all front- and split-page stories in 1981-82; only seven of 23 non-Gannett papers used such high percentages. All eight Gannett papers ranked economic news among their top four categories; 17 of the 23 non-Gannett papers ranked it among the top four. Gannett papers -- perhaps seeking a more affluent audience of investors and business people -- thus seemed more inclined than newspapers in general to emphasize economic news.

Education and the Classic Arts. This category included stories about the substance (not the politics or financing) of education, plus a few stories about religion, history, medicine, and the humanities. No newspaper placed heavy emphasis on education, but the Gannett papers appeared more inclined than others to do so. After acquisition by Gannett, two newspapers increased education coverage, two reduced it,

and one held even. Among non-Gannett papers in that time span, three increased such coverage and nine reduced it. But eleven non-Gannett papers included no such stories on their 1981-82 main pages; only one Gannett paper excluded them entirely. Gannett papers led their groups in education coverage in five cases out of eight, trailed in two, held the center in one

Other categories: Coverage by all papers in other categories tended to be sufficiently sparse to make detailed narrative analysis unrewarding. The chart (page 23) summarizes trends among Gannett and non-Gannett papers in all 11 categories.

In summary, it appears that in kinds of news content, Gannett follows general industry trends as to stories about public health and welfare, science and invention, crime, accidents and disaster, and war. However, they are somewhat less inclined to dwell on violence than are other papers. Gannett papers place greater emphasis on popular arts and entertainment, somewhat more emphasis on education coverage, and slightly more emphasis on economic news. They place less emphasis on human interest stories and public moral problem

CATEGORY OF NEWS	Number of newspapers increasing coverage after Gannett acquired its paper in the group.		Number of newspapers decreasing coverage.		Number of groups in which the Gannett paper led in this category.	Number of groups in which the Gannett paper trailed.	Number of papers in which this was one of the top five categories.	
	Gannett papers	Non-Gannett	Gannett	Non-Gannett			Gannett	Non-Gannett
Popular Arts	4	2	1	7	5	2	6	8
Crime	2	7	2	6	2	3	7	19
Disaster	3	6	1	6	1	5	4	17
Human Interest	1	9	3	4	3	5	3	15
Politics	2	7	2	4	2	4	8	23
Economy	3	7	1	6	3	2	8	17
Education	2	3	2	9	5	2	2	6
Public Health and Welfare	2	7	2	4	2	3	0	5
Public Moral Problems	2	8	3	2	0	7	0	5
Science and Invention	1	5	2	4	2	2	1	1
War and Defense	Data not valid because varying dates of acquisition place the Vietnam war in some but not all figures.				1	6	3	14

stories, and slightly less emphasis on political news.

Summary Measurements

In order to determine whether Gannett newspapers use their space differently than do other newspapers, the Summary Measurements defined earlier were made. Longitudinal comparisons are based on the changes made from the 1976-77 base year to the 1981-82 "current" year. Other comparisons are based on figures for the 1981-82 year.

Total Pages. During the five-year period most papers in the study increased the number of pages per issue. Two Gannett papers, however, and two independent papers reduced the number of pages, and one Gannett paper made no change. In three of the four cities where reductions occurred there was a loss in city population. In three of the four cities, the newspaper losing pages has high CPM advertising rates. Reductions in page numbers appear to be a function of advertising losses. Taken as a group, Gannett papers published .3 of one percent fewer pages at the end of the five years, while non-Gannett papers published 13.2 percent more pages.

Advertising. Three Gannett newspapers led their groups in the percentage of total space devoted to advertising, one was second among six papers, two fell at the midpoints, two

trailed or were near the end. But taken as a group, Gannett during the five years expanded its newshole -- that is, reduced the percentage of advertising -- while other papers, as a group, reduced the newshole. As a group, Gannett in 1981-82 had the lowest percentage of advertising in their papers, non-Gannett chain papers had the highest, and independent papers were in the middle.

News Content. The portion of the newshole devoted to current significant news has, in the papers studied, diminished in size during the period studied. The reduction appears to have been less drastic in Gannett papers, perhaps partly because Gannett papers were already high in advertising and low in news content when Gannett acquired them. In the aggregate, Gannett papers in 1981-82 gave more space to news than did other chain papers. Independent papers beat both groups. The independents gave 14.3% of their space to news, Gannett 13.5%, other chain papers 11.7%.

Sports. Over the five-year period, Gannett increased the amount of sports news published in both absolute and relative terms. Non-Gannett papers, as a group, increased it in absolute terms but reduced it as a percentage of total content. Gannett and non-Gannett papers now both devote about 5.7% of total space to sports.

Features. Most Gannett papers have increased features coverage since their acquisition by Gannett, while most other

papers in the study reduced it. Even so, in the aggregate, Gannett papers spend less space on features than do other chain papers, and chain papers less than independents.

Entertainment. Gannett papers began the transition period with less space devoted to entertainment than did non-Gannett papers, and held the percentage about steady. Other chain papers held steady but at a higher level. Independent papers reduced entertainment content and are now about even with Gannett papers.

Packaging. All three groups of papers appear to be using about the same percentages of space for white space, headlines, promotional material, and eye-catching graphics. annett and independent papers have edged slightly upward in this regard, other chain papers slightly downward.

Detailed Measurements

Roughly one out of four papers in the study was measured more finely and in more categories. The most interesting results:

Local News. Gannett prides itself on the local autonomy of its papers,[26] and the papers are more inclined to discuss local issues on the editorial page. However, Gannett continues to trail independent papers in the amount of space devoted to local news. During the five-year longitudinal period, local

news space in Gannett papers diminished by 15% and in independent papers by 16.7%. In non-Gannett chain papers it plummeted 45.3%, and they bring up the rear in this regard.

State News. Gannett and independent papers are about even with each other and far ahead of other chain papers in space devoted to state news. But state news gets only about 35 to 40% as much space as local news -- in a Gannett paper, only, on the average, 3.4% of the space available.

Regional News. All groups of papers devote little space to news from states bordering theirs -- .1 to .2 of one percent of all space available. The Gannett papers in the study were unusually heavy in regional news coverage before Gannett acquired them -- about .7 of one percent of space -- but under Gannett they dropped to the norm. That raises a question for future research: were these primary papers in a region, and did Gannett narrow the scope of what had been regional papers?

National News. Here, too, Gannett shows more in common with independent papers than with other chains. Measured from Gannett acquisition of its paper until 1982, independents increased their national news space by 65%, Gannett papers by 20%, while other chain papers held steady. Independents lead in this regard (perhaps because wire service copy is less expensive than some other kinds of content they could

buy) with Gannett papers second and other chain papers a poor third.

International News. Independent papers have slightly increased their attention to this coverage (perhaps, again, because of wire service costs) while non-Gannett chains cut back on international coverage and Gannett papers did neither. Gannett papers now lead the other two groups in this respect. But international news is scant in all kinds of papers.

Markets. Earlier in this paper it was suggested that Gannett might be aiming at an affluent business audience. The papers acquired by Gannett were heavy in market news under their previous owners; Gannett has maintained this coverage. Independent and other chain papers have increased stock and commodity coverage but have not attained the level that exists in Gannett papers.

Statistics, Obituaries, Calendars, and Graphs. Gannett and independent papers are well ahead of other chain papers in percentage of space devoted to these figures. That might indicate roughly the desire of the papers to be newspapers of record. It might indicate a willingness to fill space with raw material available at little cost without analyzing and narrating it. A newspaper tends to increase its use of this material after Gannett acquires the paper.

Photographs. This use of space has diminished in all groups of papers during the period under study -- ten percent

in Gannett papers, 23% in other chain papers, 29% in independents. Gannett papers as a group devote a larger percentage of space to photographs than other papers do.

Other Detailed Measurements support the Summary Measurement findings.

Breakdowns

When Local-State stories, Regional stories, and National-International stories are tallied, the counts indicate that all categories of newspapers publish a few more Local-State stories than all other kinds. Gannett papers are slightly more inclined than non-Gannett papers to print Local-State stories. But in all three categories there is almost a 50-50 balance between in-state and out-of-state stories. However, Local-State stories are longer than other kinds.

On the sports pages, Gannett papers in 1981-82 ran about 48% local sports stories, 48% national, and 4% regional. Both independent and non-Gannett chain papers tended to run just over 50% national, less than 45% local, and the rest regional.

Conclusions and Comments

It must be recognized that the figures gathered for this study were from only eight, sometimes nine, of the nearly 90 Gannett newspapers, and from "matching" newspapers that necessarily operated in different communities and faced different situations. Moreover, it proved impossible to study every issue called for by the method outlined herein. Nevertheless, some general impressions can be formed. They merit further study.

Aggregate numbers indicate that the fact of Gannett ownership influences a newspaper to differ somewhat from other newspapers. Or perhaps the connection works in reverse: perhaps Gannett becomes interested in, and acquires, a newspaper because of characteristics that set that newspaper or its community apart from other newspapers or communities.

Two opinions about the Gannett Company merge and interact. One is a critical attitude exemplified by Shaw:

> Gannett papers -- and most other papers owned by large chains -- do not command the influence or the respect that their large numbers could otherwise earn them. The publishers of most of these papers are, in fact, largely scorned for looking on their papers as "cash registers" -- for sacrificing quality to profit . . . .
>
> Other chains also have been enormously successful -- . . . generating, simultaneously, a number of disturbing questions, not only about financial profitability vs. journalistic accountability, but also about the continuing independence and integrity of the press.

The other is the attitude of Gannett itself:

> (T)he News Division feels strongly that its Groupwide function should be to help assign the best editors available for each newspaper, give them the best resources that can be mustered and then leave the pattern of content to be developed locally. Hence, any pattern you have detected among Gannett newspapers you have checked . . . would reflect the collective thoughts of those eight editors rather than any Group policy.
>
> . . . (W)e want each newspaper to shape itself according to the role it must fill in its community.

Pondering those two views, perhaps one should also consider (even if one does not accept) two views of the different functions of journalists and publishers. The journalist seeking information and public debate works within the commercial structure of free enterprise communications organizations. Publishers, however dedicated to freedom of the press, work with an eye on the ledger, persuaded that the press cannot be free unless it succeeds financially. The noblest public policy cannot save a free and effective press unless subscribers and advertisers pay the cost.

So far, the proposition that the Gannett Company is weakening the structure of American journalism has little empirical support. It might be that Allen Neuharth's publicized penchant for profit serves journalism better than his detractors admit, or even realize. The debate about the effects of chain ownership on journalism, information, freedom, and the public should continue, but it ought to continue based

rather more firmly on demonstrated fact than has been the case so far.

NOTES

1. A.M. Louis, "Growth Gets Harder at Gannett," Fortune, April 20, 1981, p. 118; David C. Coulson, "Antitrust Law and the Media: Making the Newspapers Safe for Democracy," Journalism Quarterly 57:79-85, p. 81.

2. Journalism Quarterly, ibid.

3. K. Phillips, "Busting the Media Trusts," Harper's, July 1977, p. 23; A.P. Sanoff, "America's Press: Too Much Power for Too Few?" U.S. News, Aug. 15, 1977, p. 27.

4. Harper's, ibid.; U.S. News, ibid.; "After a Rash of Takeovers, New Worries about Press Lords: 12 Biggest Newspaper Chains," U.S. News, Jan. 24, 1977, p. 54.

5. U.S. News, 8-15-77, ibid.; T. Griffith, "Vanishing Home Town Editor," Time, Nov. 28, 1977, p. 104.

6. U.S. News, 8-15-77, ibid.; D. Gelman, et al., "Gannett: Chain Reaction," Newsweek, May 22, 1978, p. 82.

7. D. Carmody, "Challenging Media Monopolies," New York Times Magazine, July 31, 1977, p. 21.

8. "Newspaper Chains -- the Growth Trend," Sept. 7, 1978.

9. Ralph B. Thrift, Jr., "How Chain Ownership Affects Editorial Views of Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly, 54: 327-331, Summer 1977, p. 327. See also F. Dennis Hale, "What Subscribers Think of Group Ownership of Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly, 57:314-316, Summer 1980.

10. Thrift, ibid.

11. Edward G. Weston, "Social Characteristics and Recruitment of American Mass Media Directors," Journalism Quarterly 55:62, Spring 1978.

12. Coulson, Journalism Quarterly, op. cit.

13. Shaw, Los Angeles Times, op. cit.

14. Benjamin M. Compaine, Who Owns the Media? White Plains, N.Y.: Knowledge Industry Publications, Inc., 1979, pp. 1-3.

15. Ibid., p. 26.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid., pp. 24-25. See also both issues of U.S. News already cited.

18. George P. Evans, An Analysis of the Local Autonomy Concept of the Gannett Newspaper Group, unpublished master's thesis, Ohio University 1966.

19. For example, Victor Jose, "Who is left to defend local media diversity?" Editor and Publisher, Aug. 8, 1981, p. 7. Even Congress has discussed it: Senate Select Committee on Small Business, hearings, May 24-25, 1979, Sen. Doc. 96-1, Y4.Sm1/2:Ec7/7; House Small Business Committee hearings, Jan. 21, 1980, and March 3-4, 1980, House Doc. 96-2, Y4.Sm1:M46/2pt. 1 and pt. 2.

20. J. Quirt, "Gannett's Prize Catch," Fortune, June 5, 1978, p. 146; Shaw, op. cit.; "Big Money Hunts for Independent Newspapers," Business Week, Feb. 21, 1977, p. 56. Compaine reports that in 1978 Gannett had a return on sales of 12%, compared with a median of 9.6% for all newspaper chains and 4.8% for all Fortune 500 corporations. Compaine, op. cit., 13-16.

21. The most glaring: Stockton, an evening paper, should have been matched with the evening Newport News Times-Herald. A comedy of errors led to study of the morning Daily Press instead, but a few Times-Herald issues were obtained. In the San Bernardino group: Torrance is equivalent in size of city and circulation, but its role as a Los Angeles suburb distorts the picture. Modesto and Bakersfield are different kinds of cities. Boulder is a much smaller city in an equivalent SMSA. St. Petersburg and Tampa are culturally different. In the Boise group, the Anchorage papers are located in a city and state not really comparable to the other cities in the group, and Racine, the city closest in size to Boise, is not a state capital and is, unlike Boise, dominated by much larger cities north and south of it.

22. Guido H. Stempel III, "Effects on Performance of a Cross-Media Monopoly," Journalism Monographs No. 29, June 1973.

23. Evans, op. cit.

24. Paul Deutschmann, News-page Content of Twelve

Metropolitan Dailies, New York: Scripps-Howard Newspapers, Inc. 1959.

25. William R. Blankenburg, "Newspaper Ownership and Control of Circulation to Increase Profits," Journalism Quarterly 59:390-398, Autumn 1982.

26. Evans, op. cit. Also, letter to the author from John C. Quinn, Senior Vice President and Chief News Executive, the Gannett Co., Inc., Feb. 12, 1983.

27. Op. cit.

28. Quinn, op. cit.